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An Appeal Concerning the Tragic Condition of the Kurdish
People in Syria.

Recent events in Syria indicate that a serious situation is developing regarding the status of the Kurds as a national community. The Baathist regime is rapidly putting into effect a plan to Arabise the Kurdish area by forceful eviction of thousands of Kurdish families from their land, and other repressive measures. Therefore, we urgently draw the attention of public opinion to this dangerous situation. We have managed to collect information from various Kurdish Organizations in Syria representing political, social and cultural aspects of Kurdish life: among them a prominent member of the Central Committee of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, and the Secretary General of the Committee for the Defence of the Kurdish People's Rights, Mr. Ismet Sharif Vanly. The only way to avert the growing possibility of civil war and indiscriminate massacre of the Kurdish population is by bringing pressure upon the Syrian Government to cease its savage campaign against the Kurds. Hence, we appeal to all organizations and individuals to do what they can to help the defenceless Kurds of Syria.

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The Kurds in Syria number about half a million (10% of the whole Syrian population). They live in three main Kurdish areas in the North of the country.

- i The Jazireh region in the Hasaka province in the North-East, where they number 300'00 (out of 390'000 for this region).
- ii The Kurd-Dagh region, to the North-West of Aleppo, entirely Kurdish, where they number 110'00.
- iii The Ain-Arab (or Arab-Pinar) region, to the North-East of Aleppo, where they number about 50'000 people.

These three regions are contiguous to Turkish Kurdistan.

From the East, Jazireh is contiguous to Iraqi Kurdistan. There are other minor dispersed groups of Kurds living in the country, including a famous quarter of Damascus in which about 12'000 Kurds live. The Kurd-Dagh is the only mountainous region inhabited by the Kurds in Syria.

The greatest majority of these Kurds are peasants (about 80%) and, thanks to their labour, the Jazireh plains have become the bread-basket of Syria. But there are also urban Kurds in five Kurdish towns, of which four are located in Jazireh; Qamishli (40'000 pop), Amouda (15'000), Derbasiya (15'000), these three being at the Turkish border, and Derik (6'000) near the Iraqi border. The fifth is Afrin (about 18'000) situated in the Kurd-Dagh region. The urban Kurd's livelihood is based mainly on small businesses.

In 1957 the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (KDP-S) was founded, with a programme aiming at obtaining the national cultural rights of the Kurds within the Syrian State and struggling for land reform and a democratic regime in Damascus for the whole country. In 1959, many of the Party leaders and members were arrested and tortured accused of struggling for an independent Kurdistan. That was under the U.A.R. (Colonel Sarraj's regime)

After the separation of Syria from Egypt in September 1961, the new Syrian regime Qudsi-Azm took the following steps, with the view to destroy the Kurdish people in Syria as an ethnical group and a national minority:

- i the elaboration of what was officially called the "Arab-Belt" plan for Jazireh (see below) in 1962;
- ii It issued a legislative decree (no 93) on August, 23, 1962 for an exceptional census of the population in the area of Jazireh only. The census was carried out in November of the same year; As a result a great number of Kurds were deprived of their Syrian Citizenship.
- iii A general campaign of oppression and racial discrimination was launched against the Kurds (see below);
- iv It was decided that those plans were a major issue and that they should involve all the successive Syrian governments. An intense publicity campaign in the Syrian Arab press was started for the purpose of nourishing nationalist hatred

amongst the Arab majority against the Kurdish population.

The Baathists took power in Syria in March, 1963, after a military coup d'etat. Although representing a small minority of chauvinistic Arab nationalists, they established a military one-party dictatorship and abolished all democratic liberties. They adopted and extended the above mentioned plans, and considerably aggravated the conditions of the Kurdish people. They also sent, in the fall of 1963, an expeditionary army to Iraqi Kurdistan and actively supported the Iraqi Baathists in the military, political and economical fields, against the Kurdish revolution. They continue to govern Syria and to implement the fascist plans for the destruction of the Kurdish people in this country. Their so-called "Arab socialism" is only a thin ideological cover. The following is a brief description of the conditions of the Kurdish people in Syria in December 1967, after more than four years of Baathist government.

The plan, as announced in Damascus, originally elaborated "to save arabism in Jazireh" to destroy the Kurdish population in the most important area, and the richest part of the country. All the Kurdish rural population living along the Turkish and Iraqi borders were to be evacuated by force. These peasants had the choice either to emigrate to other countries or to be collectively transferred by the Government to the Al-Radd or to

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other barren areas of Hasaka, where hardly a plant can grow, because of the saline nature of the soil and lack of water. Arab bedouines or "fellahin", brought from other regions, were to be transplanted in the Kurdish villages.

The "Arab-Belt" area, as announced by the Government, constitutes, in Jazireh, a long strip of good agricultural and well cultivated land, about 280 km long .. adjacent to the Turkist border, and 10 km wide. The width was to be 15 km where oil was discovered because, as wrote the Syrian Arab press, "the oil triangle was to be saved for arabism". The number of the Kurdish villages in this area is 332. Their total population numbers about 140'000 people, all peasants, farmers or small owners. After the establishment of the Baathist regime, the KDP-S made it clear that the Kurds fully support the land reform project but that the land should remain in the hands of the peasantry. The Government refused to receive the Party or peasant delegations who came to Damascus with the hope to discuss the matter with the Authorities. Daham Al-Hadi and other chiefs of the Shammar Arab nomadic tribe profited from the circumstances by occupying by force some Kurdish villages, often with help of the Syrian security forces.

When the Baathist regime began to follow what they call "Arab socialism" - which has nothing to do with socialism - they changed the name of the "Arab-Belt" into a "plan for the establishment

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of model State farms" in Jazireh. Under the cover of this new kind of national-socialism, the Kurdish minority of Syria was thus to be struck to death.

Since 1966 the regime has begun seriously to implement the plan, and has extended it, on the same bases, to the two other main Kurdish areas of the North: Kurd-Dagh (where they began to implement it in the locality of Gindres) and Arab-Pinar.

Only recently the Government told the villagers of the "Belt" area that they had no longer any right on their land and their villages, and that they should prepare to leave. They were forbidden to seed or to harvest their land. The defenceless Kurdish peasants adopted an attitude of passive resistance. Their spokesmen told the Authorities: "We are not moving! We prefer to die of hunger on the spot rather than to leave our villages! You may bring your Army and kill us, we shall not be moved!"

Then the Authorities proclaimed that the lands in the "Belt" area were Stateowned, and teams of State employees, equipped with tractors and escorted by security forces, were sent on the spot to plough and seed the land. New villages are being built for those employees in the neighbourhood of the Kurdish villages. But still the Kurdish peasants continue to refuse to move from their homes,

but they can no longer live on their lands. Their conditions are most tragic, because they may die of hunger and disease. They have no work, no hospitals, no physicians, and no schools for their children. Many of them and many Party members have been arrested and are being tortured, and imprisoned without trial. A few families emigrated either to Turkey or to Lebanon.

The Kurdish urban population of Qamishli, Amouda and Derbasiyah situated within the "Belt" area have not yet been asked to move. But they suffer from other kind of oppression and racial discrimination as we shall see later. Their turn will also come, when Damascus will have achieved its "final solution" for the Kurdish peasantry.

To "save the arabism of Jazireh" - where Arabs represent less than 20% of the population and are chiefly nomad bedouines - it was necessary to try to destroy in one way or another the Kurdish majority. The "Arab Belt" plan is one way towards that objective. But there have been other ways.

Before the census of November, 1962, the Kurds of Jazireh numbered about 300'000 people, and they all had the Syrian identity cards, as Syrian citizens. After the census, Damascus pretended that only roughly 60% of these Kurds were Syrians. The others, it was said were not Syrians "but they had illegally infiltrated from Turkey and Iraq into Syria, with the help of imperialism, to destroy

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the arabism of Jazireh and to create a puppet Kurdish State". Within a few days, the Syrian nationality was thus withdrawn from about 120'000 Kurds. It was very simple: The Authorities prepared lists containing the names of those who were considered as Syrians, and the population was invited to apply for new identity cards from the administration, the old ones having been "cancelled". Only those whose names figure on the new lists could get the new cards. Very often, within one family, the father was considered as Syrian, but not the wife, or not the children. In the richest areas, whole Kurdish villages and localities were refused the new cards.

The majority of 120'000 Kurds who thus lost their Syrian citizenship, whether peasants or city-dwellers, whether within or outside the "Arab Belt" zone, continue to live in Syria, but henceforth as aliens and suspected elements.

- i They cannot be employed by the Government as civil servants or officers in the Army and the police;
- ii They cannot be employed even in the private economic sector, having not the necessary identity cards;
- iii They cannot sell or buy any land
- iv They cannot repair their houses without a special authorisation² from the government, which is very difficult to obtain.
- v They cannot send their children to the State schools - if they exist. But there are hardly any private schools in the area.

If the children attend any private or religious school, they will not be admitted to the State examinations for the "certificate" of elementary studies or the "baccalaureat" of secondary studies.

vi They cannot be admitted to any public hospital, but there are no private clinics in the area. More than 3,000 cases of tuberculosis and many more cases of malaria are known in Jazireh

vii But these Kurds are good enough to be drafted into the compulsory military service, however.

viii But the Kurds of Syria, whether they are recognized as Syrians or not, whether they live inside or outside the "Belt" areas, are all subject to an odious and most outrageous national oppression:

i their existence as a national community is not recognised by the Government. They have no rights as Kurds, no Kurdish schools, no Kurdish papers.

ii Their party, the KDP-S, is an "illegal" and underground one.

iii Any Kurdish book, or any book in any foreign language on the Kurds, even if it were a literary one or an alphabet, is strictly forbidden.

iv If a Kurd says publicly that he is a Kurd and not an Arab he will be publicly insulted and arrested, under the charge "to incite to hatred and racism"; he will also be told "to go home", because "Syria is only an Arab country where there is no room for other national elements".

v All Kurdish national or folkloric manifestations, including the centuries - old "Noruz" day, are strictly forbidden.

vi The Kurdish music is also forbidden. Any Kurd who tunes his radio to a Kurdish (foreign) station , to hear news or music would be arrested if discovered. Kurdish music or song records were publicly destroyed by "zealous" Syrian officers or policemen in the coffee shops of Qamishli.

vii The administration, the Army and the security forces have been purged of the Kurdish officers and public servants, unless they prove themselves servile and say that they are Arabs. Kurds are no longer admitted to the Military school.

viii Policy requisitions in the night in the Kurdish houses are a daily practice. If any Kurdish book on the Kurds and Kurdistan is discovered, the man would be arrested and beaten: "Dirty Kurd, a Kurdish dog!" If the suspected man is not at home, his wife would be savagely beaten, the children terrorised, the house holdings and furniture ransacked. Many Kurdish women died during such requisitions.

ix If a Kurd has something to go to a Government Department he would be repulsed, insulted and asked to go to the devil if he does not speak Arabic. If he does and says that he is "Syrian", he also would be assaulted, because he should say that he is an "Arab".